Four Primary Teachers Work to Define Constructivism and Teacher-Directed Learning: Implications for Teacher Assessment

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Abstract

In this article we analyze audiotaped and transcribed discussions among a group of teachers and a researcher working together to describe and implement instructional conversations—a form of constructivist teaching. The second author and 4 teachers began working together as part of a larger university and school collaboration to improve language arts instruction at a predominantly Latino school in the Los Angeles area. 3 of the teachers taught in Spanish as part of the bilingual program for native Spanish speakers. We present here our analysis of the group's first 9 (of 30) meetings during a school year. The meetings constitute a case of teachers grappling with how to conceive, understand, and ultimately synthesize different models of teaching. The group's initial goal was to develop curriculum and instruction that improved students' literacy attainment and were consistent with the state's new language arts framework. In the course of their work, the group discovered that the search for new teaching approaches does not require abandoning more "traditional" tools of the trade. To the contrary, the process of defining traditional modes of instruction helped teachers conceptualize and operationalize the alternative to which they aspired. We raise a number of critical issues related to conceptualizing frameworks for teaching and developing new teacher assessments. We argue that new assessments should reflect a comprehensive view of teaching that draws from a broad continuum of teaching models, synthesizing that which is often dichotomized.

Developing and conducting teacher assessments is a serious undertaking. Professional competence evaluation has high-stakes consequences (McGaghie, 1991). Teachers are certified, tenured, and fired based on evaluations of their work. Beyond gatekeeping, other important expectations are associated with teacher assessment. Many educators assume that high-quality teacher evaluation

systems enhance classroom instruction (McGreal, 1988). The work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is based on the assumption that articulating standards and developing new assessments for evaluating teachers will redefine and elevate the status of the teaching profession (Shapiro, 1995). Numerous state and district initiatives are based on the expectation that newly developed assessment systems will promote curricular and instructional reforms (Lomask, Pecheone, & Baron, 1995). In short, new teacher assessments are expected to influence what teachers do and the ways in which they think about teaching.

The central point that we put forth in this article is that new assessments should reflect a comprehensive view of teaching, drawing from a broad continuum of teaching models and synthesizing across that which is often dichotomized: traditional versus alternative, transmission versus constructivism, direct teaching versus assisted performance, sage on the stage versus guide from the side, and so on. Moreover, the framework itself should describe various forms of teaching as explicitly as possible.

The notion of an explicit, comprehensive framework for teaching sounds logical. It makes sense that teachers should be encouraged to develop a wide repertoire of knowledge and skills to achieve varying goals. It is a defensible basis for assessing teachers. Such an undertaking, however, will be a substantial challenge. First, it has not been done before. There is no history in American education, either at the theoretical or the practical level, of synthesizing across differing views of teaching. Second, the literature is lopsided. Although there is considerable empirical work on direct instruction, there are far fewer empirical models to draw on in describing the nature and outcomes of constructivist teaching. Third, in many cases, new teacher assessments are being developed specifically to promote teacher change toward constructivism. Striving for synthesis or comprehensiveness might sound like an undesirable compromise. We contend that such a synthesis is necessary if a real and lasting change in teaching is to be achieved.

Educational reformers have long called for changes in how teachers teach. In the eighteenth century, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Johann Pestalozzi argued against teacher-directed, "wordy" teaching. They favored what Pestalozzi called more "natural systems." Rousseau wrote, "We acquire . . . notions more clear and certain, of things we thus learn of ourselves, than of those we are taught by others" (Gross, 1963, pp. 54–55). Rousseau and Pestalozzi sounded a theme to be repeated regularly over the next 2 centuries: Teachers need to talk less and promote more active, authentic, and engaging learning experiences for children (Butts, 1955; Cohen, 1988; Cuban, 1984, 1990; Goodlad, 1984).

More recent calls for reform in teaching coalesce around the banner of "constructivism," a theory of knowledge in keeping with Rousseau's and Pestalozzi's injunctions. According to constructivist theories, humans are natural learners whose inclination is to make sense of experience (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Some adherents of constructivism assign little or no value to knowledge or understanding that originates away from the learner. For example, Accelerated Schools, a highly regarded recent reform effort, declares that its "philosophy and process are firmly grounded in a constructivist epistemology." It adds: "The traditional approach assumes that learners are empty vessels, needing only to be 'filled' with appropriate knowledge, and that knowledge is generated elsewhere, outside of the learner. Constructivism, on the other hand, understands learning as the process of a learner *constructing* knowledge and personal meaning from new experience" ("Constructivism and the Accelerated Schools Model," 1994, p. 11; emphasis in original).

Yet, despite such caricatures of traditional teaching, there is a broad literature

demonstrating that it is effective when done well. Modeling, demonstrations, clear explanations, lectures, feedback, correctives, and practice all promote learning (Gage, 1978; Gage & Berliner, 1988; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986; Walberg, 1990). Even recitation—long the favorite target of educational reformers (e.g., Hoetker & Ahlbrand, 1969; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Thayer, 1927)—contributes to student learning. Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993), for example, concluded that "classroom management," which includes "questioning/recitation strategies that maintain active participation by all students" (p. 256), has the largest influence on learning of the 28 categories of variables they reviewed. Similarly, Stodolsky, Ferguson, and Wimpelberg (1981) found that during recitations "children's attention is relatively high [and that] public practice, review and checking work may facilitate learning" (p. 129).

Reformers, including those developing frameworks for new methods of teacher assessment, thus face an important question: Assuming that teaching needs to change—and we have no doubt that it does—how should it change? By encouraging and training teachers to move toward student-engaging, "adventurous," constructivist teaching? Or by helping teachers do more skillfully that which many already do in some measure, that is, relatively traditional teaching designed to impart knowledge and teach skills? Our premise in this article is that reformers must do both. Because in principle teacher assessment can influence how teachers teach, we argue that reformers must develop and use assessment tools that acknowledge the contribution of both traditional and constructivist modes of teaching. We suspect that the successful reform of teaching and teacher assessment will depend less on replacing the traditional with some alternative and more on a synthesis of traditional and alternative modes, based on a sophisticated understanding of what is most effective, under what conditions, and for what purposes.

In this article we tell the story of a group of four teachers and a researcher working together to describe and implement instructional conversations—a form of constructivist teaching. The group's activities took place in the late 1980s when the state department of education issued a new framework for language arts calling for more emphasis on higher-level thinking and meaning-making (California State Department of Education, 1987). Teachers in this group were interested in pursuing the ideas laid out in the framework, and they anticipated that their school and they themselves would be held accountable for implementing the framework ideas. At the same time, they had little experience with the underlying constructivist view of teaching espoused in the framework. They were more familiar with direct instruction (DI), which at the time was a central part of their district's training and instructional program.

We present here our analysis of the group's first nine (of 30) meetings during 1 school year. These nine meetings constitute a case of teachers grappling with how to conceive, understand, and ultimately synthesize different models of teaching. The group spent a good deal of time reading about and discussing the nature of and relation between traditional and alternative forms of teaching, specifically, direct instruction and instructional conversation. The teachers discovered that the search for new forms of teaching does not require abandoning more traditional tools of the trade. To the contrary, the process of carefully defining traditional modes of instruction helped teachers conceptualize and operationalize the alternative to which they aspired. Eventually, the group arrived at a synthesis, rather than a dichotomization, of traditional and alternative teaching.

Teacher assessment itself is neither a feature of the group's discussions nor an explicit part of our analysis. Nevertheless, the case raises a number of critical issues related to conceptualizing a comprehensive framework for teaching and therefore a

comprehensive framework for the assessment of teaching.

Context of Study and the Group's Work

The researcher (second author) and four teachers began working together as part of a larger university and school collaboration to improve language arts instruction at a predominantly Latino school in the Los Angeles area (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1990). The group's initial goal was to develop curriculum and instruction that improved students' literacy attainment and were consistent with the state's new language arts framework. In particular, teachers wanted to be able to help their students engage in the kind of deep and insightful meaning-making advocated, but not adequately described, in the state framework. After a year of developing materials and activities, the group turned its attention to teaching. Teachers were accustomed to using direct instruction as part of their reading program, but they wanted to explore alternative modes of teaching to promote higher levels of comprehension.

Although the group did not begin with the intention of implementing a specific model of instruction, the model that eventually evolved came to be called instructional conversation or IC (following Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, 1989). Over the course of the year, the teachers and the researcher planned and conducted numerous ICs, many of which were videotaped. During weekly after-school meetings, the group viewed and discussed videotaped lessons, planned subsequent ICs, and consistently tried to identify and describe the elements that seemed to characterize ICs (see Goldenberg, 1992/1993, for a description of the IC elements the group developed). As the group came to conceptualize it, a good IC is an engaging discussion conducted by a teacher and a group of students. It is about something that matters to the participants, has a coherent and discernible focus, involves a high level of participation, allows teacher and students to explore ideas and thoughts in depth, and ultimately helps students arrive at higher levels of understanding about the topics under discussion (e.g., content, themes, and personal experiences related to a story).

All four teachers in the group taught in the primary grades: one in kindergarten, another in first grade, and two in second grade. Three taught in Spanish as part of the bilingual program for native Spanish speakers, and one of the second-grade teachers worked with native English speakers. Three of the four teachers were veterans with at least 7 years of experience; the other teacher was in her third year of teaching. Teachers' actual classroom use of IC was confirmed by numerous videotapes. All four teachers became more adept at using elements of ICs in their reading lessons, as we documented in previous analyses (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1990; Rueda, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 1991).

An earlier analysis of the transcripts from the group's meetings (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Hamann, 1992) focused on how teachers learned to conduct ICs: What happened in the meetings that might have contributed to teachers' ability to perform a kind of teaching that was, by teachers' own admissions, new and challenging for them? The analysis revealed two things. First, the meetings, as led by Goldenberg, were themselves ICs, characterized by many of the same elements the group identified over the course of the year, for example, clear focus, using prior knowledge, responsivity, high levels of participation, and direct teaching as needed. Second—and related to the central point of this article—through the ICs in the meetings, teachers had the opportunity to conceptualize and operationalize instructional conversation in explicit terms, an effort that spanned the entire year but began in the early meetings that are analyzed in this article.

Method

The researcher and teachers met 30 times throughout the year (each meeting was approximately 2 hours). The researcher prepared fieldnotes for the first two meetings and audiotaped the remaining 28. The analysis in this article is based on fieldnotes and transcripts for meetings 1–9. By meeting 10, the group had decided to focus exclusively on identifying and describing the elements of IC and implementing it as part of reading comprehension instruction. That focus emerged gradually across meetings 1–9 as the group discussed reading comprehension, traditional and alternative modes of teaching, published articles on direct instruction (e.g., Gersten & Carnine, 1986; Rosenshine, 1986), and concepts related to instructional conversation (e.g., Au, 1979; Haggard, 1988; Tharp & Gallimore, 1989). Fieldnotes and transcripts from these nine meetings allowed us to analyze (1) the way teachers initially talked about and compared traditional teaching and the alternatives to which they aspired and (2) the ways in which their talk and comparisons changed over the course of the first nine meetings.

Data analysis involved three phases. First, the first author analyzed fieldnotes from meetings 1 and 2 and transcripts from meetings 3–9; he identified a total of 105 segments in which teachers talked about traditional and/or alternative modes of teaching. (A transcript segment is a portion of talk that has an identifiable focus and that conveys a reasonably complete idea, issue, or perspective; a segment can be as short as a two-line utterance from one participant or a long series of interchanges among many participants.) Informed by conversation analytic methods (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 1987), the first author prepared a short written analysis of each segment (a "case work-up"). Each case work-up provided an interpretation of the content and segment's relevance to this article's topic.

During the preparation of these work-ups, a pattern seemed to be apparent across the nine meetings. In earlier meetings, teachers tended to describe traditional and alternative forms of teaching in general terms, and they seemed to hold the two in opposition to one another. During later meetings, they were much more specific in talking about each, and the group seemed to arrive at a synthesis of the two.

The second phase of analysis confirmed this pattern. The first author coded into three categories 55 of the most comprehensible segments (those in which the content of the talk was most transparent and required the least interpretation). The three categories are reported in the Results section's "Overview."

All case work-ups and codings for the 55 segments were reviewed and revised as needed by the second author. As shown in Table 1, coding the segments confirmed the general pattern across meetings 1–9, from implicit to explicit descriptions of traditional and alternative teaching and simultaneously from a dichotomization to a synthesis of the two.

During the third phase of analysis, the first author prepared a lengthy write-up, using 17 representative segments to illustrate and describe the progression across meetings 1–9. Both of us revised the write-up several times in order to agree on what seemed to be a plausible interpretation of the data. The Results section is a condensed version of the final form of that write-up.

Finally, we recently conducted follow-up telephone interviews with three teachers in the group whom we were able to contact. As part of another analysis (Saunders & Goldenberg, in press), we wanted to know more about teachers' ability to sustain ICs after their participation in the group, and whether teachers used ICs in other curricular areas. Within the context of the interviews, however, we also asked teachers about their continued use of direct instruction and the extent to which the group's early discussions of DI and IC had any last-

ing effects on their teaching and the way they thought about teaching.

Results and Discussion

Overview

Meetings 1–4: Implicit terms and dichotomizing. Teachers operated from a dichotomy based on an implicit understanding of traditional and alternative modes of teaching, rejecting as largely ineffectual (in the context of trying to promote higher-level thinking and discussion among students) any teaching behaviors connected with traditional modes while extolling the virtues of idealized notions of alternative instruction.

Meetings 5–7: More explicit terms and conserving. Teachers' understandings of what constituted traditional and alternative teaching became more explicit, permitting (1) a conserving process in which valuable features of traditional instruction were identified as viable rather than being rejected categorically and (2) clarification of what was meant by "alternative."

Meetings 8–9: Explicit terms and synthesizing. Traditional and alternative teaching were further analyzed and made explicit, providing the basis for a synthesis of the two that came in two forms: (1) agreement that each form of teaching had its particular areas of effectiveness and (2) even within episodes of alternative teaching (here, instructional conversation), the need for more traditional teaching, such as direct teaching, often arises ("direct teaching as needed" became an element of instructional conversation).

Meetings 1–4: Implicit Terms and Dichotomizing

Although the first two meetings were not audiotaped, fieldnotes reveal the presence of the dichotomy in its implicit form. The teachers associated the articles on explicit instruction of reading comprehension (Gersten & Carnine, 1986) with Madeline Hunter's model of direct instruction, which was emphasized in their district's training for new teachers. The teachers sometimes referred derisively to the Hunter model as "the seven-step" or made disapproving references to its components, for example, modeling, checking for understanding. At least two of the teachers were vehement in their opposition to such teaching. They characterized it as "rigid and formulaic" and in direct contrast to the kind of teaching they wanted to learn to do. (In the subsequent dialogue, all teachers' names are pseudonyms; Claude Goldenberg [CG] is the researcher.) For example: "I want to learn to do what she's (Mary's) doing," Jana said. "[I'm] tired of all this direct instruction, objectives, structured teaching, modeling, checking for understanding, etc., etc., etc. [I] want to get into the creative, dynamic, spontaneous teaching that Mary [does]" (meeting 02: page 06/case 12).

Jana was the most vocal advocate of alternative teaching and the most vehement critic of traditional forms of teaching (seven-step, Distar, basals, workbooks).

TABLE 1. Frequencies for Coded Segments by Meeting

	Meetings									
Coding Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Totals
Implicit terms and dichotomizing	1	3	4	1	2	...	...	...	...	11
More explicit terms and conserving	...	2	4	4	7	4	4	2	1	28
Explicit terms and synthesizing	...	...	...	1	...	...	2	4	9	16
Totals	1	5	8	6	9	4	6	6	10	55

However, the way she framed the issue is consistent with the other teachers' perceptions. They thought the traditional teaching with which they were familiar was outdated, limited, and ineffectual for their most important teaching goals. Traditional teaching, they felt, did not address higher-level thinking skills and language development. Some alternative form of teaching was necessary—something dynamic, spontaneous, and creative rather than routinized, textbook-driven, and skill-based.

The instructional issue was framed in terms of traditional versus alternative. The traditional had to be at least severely curtailed, perhaps even eliminated and replaced, by some alternative. Typically, the teachers discussed traditional or direct teaching pejoratively:

- "The seven-step bla bla stuff"
- (In a mocking tone) "Now the objective for today's lesson is . . ."
- "Having children repeat or reproduce whatever you just did"
- "The teacher does all the talking"
- "The repetitive stuff"

Although the teachers acknowledged that at times they taught a skill or concept directly, they still considered much of direct teaching—at least as they knew it—as scripted, mechanistic, and formalistic. They did not consider it teaching in the best sense.

At this implicit level, alternative teaching was defined in reference to the perceived shortcomings of traditional instruction (i.e., *not* doing all the talking, *not* just modeling and having students copy). For example, in the third meeting, Mary described a science lesson she thought was particularly successful.

> *CG:* So was the idea you wanted to get across, was how [the animals] are particularly adapted?
>
> *Mary:* How they're adapted to where they live and that they live there so they can find their homes. They like to live in the trees for their homes or whatever. They find food there. The climate, the weather suits their fancy. They like to live there because of that. Uhm, they have really good stuff to eat that they wouldn't have some place else. You know. And, they found that out like all by their little selves. You know. With—
>
> *Sue:* Without you lecturing.
>
> *Mary:* Yeah. And I didn't tell them anything about that. They gave me every bit of the conversation. They told me everything. I told them nothing. (03:19/029)

Mary implicitly presents her science lesson as an example of alternative teaching. Of interest here is the characteristic used to distinguish the lesson. According to Mary's account, the students themselves had constructed a number of understandings about animal habitats: "They found that out like all by their little selves." This point about "finding out by themselves" resurfaces in subsequent meetings as a critical component of alternative teaching. More important, however, is how Sue recharacterizes the account—from what the children did to what Mary did *not* do: "Without you lecturing." At this implicit level, the notion of a teacher lecturing or telling is the defining characteristic distinguishing traditional from alternative teaching. For these teachers, as for Rousseau and Pestalozzi more than 2 centuries before, traditional and alternative teaching were identifiable by the presence or absence of a teacher's "telling." The challenge confronting the group, however, was developing an understanding of alternative teaching in terms of the presence, rather than the absence, of some behavior(s). If one does not tell, then what—exactly—does one do?

By the fourth meeting, additional articles had been introduced (Au, 1979; Haggard, 1988; Tharp & Gallimore, 1989). The second set of articles provided a contrast to the first set and to some extent encouraged or allowed for more explicit discussion of traditional and alternative teaching, with

direct instruction becoming an example of traditional teaching and the alternative simply referred to as some "other" way of teaching that had not yet been labeled. In the latter part of the meeting, CG asked the teachers to compare the two sets of articles. Both Alicia and Jana immediately validated the article on responsive teaching (Tharp & Gallimore, 1989). As Alicia noted, "It is what we should be doing more."

Alicia: As I was reading this [article], I kept thinking, this is what we should be doing. I should be doing more.
Jana: That's what the [state's new language arts] framework is gonna push. When we have our next review, that's what they're gonna look for. Whether or not this is happening in the classroom.
CG: What's that?
Jana: Responsive teaching. Where children are—children are actually talking and teachers acting as facilitator. More or less. Not modeling and having children repeat or reproduce whatever you just did. Isn't that in the thing we—
Mary: Yeah.
Sue: Can we go back and forth from one to the other. Can we do some repetitive stuff and then turn it off and step back and—
Mary: I think you can.
Sue: I think. Yeah.
Alicia: Yeah.
Jana: I think it would be beneficial.
Alicia: The error is that the teacher does all the talking. (04:33/062)

Jana's first comment is particularly important because she clearly invokes teacher assessment concerns: "That's what . . . in our next review . . . they're gonna look for." The California State Department of Education, in numerous curricular and instructional frameworks, had strongly advocated more constructivist approaches to teaching (Jana: "That's what the framework is gonna push"). Jana correctly notes that the "responsive teaching" article is describing the sort of teaching that will become (at least in principle) the focus of school and teacher reviews. The "alternative" is not only desired, but it will soon be expected—something for which teachers will be held accountable. She follows her articulation of the mandate, however, with a vague characterization of the practice: "Children are actually talking and teachers acting as facilitator. More or less. Not modeling and having children repeat or reproduce whatever you just did." Again, at this implicit level, alternative teaching is defined by dissociating it from the traditional: Children are engaged in genuine talk rather than reproducing what teachers feed them.

In contrast to Jana's dichotomization, however, Sue (following Mary's "Yeah") offers a different possibility: "Can you go back and forth from one to the other." In effect, Sue is suggesting a different way to frame the issue, one that would embrace both kinds of teaching rather than replace one with the other. However, although she characterizes traditional teaching ("repetitive stuff"), she has no words to describe an alternative: "Can we do some repetitive stuff and then turn it off and step back and—". No one else is able to complete her proposition. Mary, Alicia, and Jana sanction the possibility of doing both, and then Alicia invokes the problem of too much teacher talk as a justification: "The error is that the teacher does all the talking."

At this point, as Alicia articulates it, doing and maintaining both kinds of teaching is desirable not because it might achieve some previously unattainable instructional goal, but because it diminishes the assumed failing of traditional instruction where the teacher does all the talking. If one does both, one is at least beginning to do less talking. (It is interesting to note the use of the word *can:* "Can you go back and forth." It is possible that Mary is asking whether a teacher is actually able to do this successfully: "Can we do some repetitive stuff and then turn it off and step back." Mary might be referring to this when she says, "I think you can." However, both Alicia and Jana

take the comment in a different direction, interpreting "can" in terms of whether it is desirable or permissible to do so, given the injunctions about what teachers should be doing.)

The teachers are defining the problem with traditional teaching as too much teacher talk. Such a conception is not unusual. Other researchers have documented similar tendencies among teachers to define alternative forms of teaching in terms of the amount of teacher talk: "You go to school for 12 years and basically sit there and listen. . . . Then when you start to teach, you are suddenly told, 'Oh, no! You can't talk all the time.' " Or, "Your portfolio shows that not all students were engaged in learning chemistry. This may be due to your . . . heavy reliance on lecturing" (Lomask et al., 1995). Defining the problem with traditional teaching as too much teacher talk, however, leaves considerable latitude in defining what the alternatives might be. Perhaps instinctively, teachers (and others) identify the alternative as something that is more natural, relaxed, perhaps even "conversational." Soon after the previous excerpt, Alicia recounts the experience she associates with the concept of instructional conversation mentioned in the responsive teaching article. As she notes: "I do a lot of that with K[indergartner]s. Yeah, we do a lot of talking."

> *Alicia:* During recess time, we go to the K yard and I sit. Just sit there. And the kids will come to me. And they will sit around and very naturally this conversation gets started. And it's—I find it very relaxed. A little bit different than how I would feel in the classroom. I've seen that. And I think that is interesting that in the classroom we are so formal and we want to—
>
> *Sue:* Time.
>
> *Alicia:* Yeah. Time. And it's so formal, and then outside, we just let them experience. We relate it to maybe something we're talking about and I wish—And I'm thinking, I wish we did the same in the classroom. I wish I'd feel the same. Just sitting there having the kids sitting around me and just talking. We do some of that but it's not as—It's much more structured in the room. (04:35/064)

Embedded in Alicia's account are a number of perceptions about schooling and teaching and learning that go back at least 200 years. She longs for an instructional context in her classroom that preserves the congeniality and the human quality she finds in the kindergarten yard. The classroom and the traditional teaching she is accustomed to are formal, constrained by time, and structured. In contrast, the K yard is almost pastoral, experiential, and most important, conversational. In subsequent meetings (excerpts to follow), Alicia and her colleagues begin defining and instantiating a mode of instruction that synthesizes what is here characterized as mutually exclusive opposites, eventually conserving some of the necessary aspects of the classroom while developing more fully some of the appealing and productive qualities from the K yard.

Before moving to the next section of the analysis, it is important to note the teachers' propensity to dichotomize, to pit one form of teaching against another. As they do so, they elevate a desired, although vague, alternative while denigrating caricatures of traditional teaching. This propensity is representative of some aspects of the larger reform discourse that was becoming common in California at the time. The state's language arts framework makes no attack on direct instruction. In fact, the document includes several references to the need for direct instruction of reading and writing strategies and skills. The document, however, includes a number of highly charged juxtapositions. For example, "The structuring of an English-language arts program around matters so *intensely personal and human* as expression and language cannot be limited to a daily list of ten or 15 skill ob-

jectives or to completion of *meaningless work sheets*, sometimes called *the dismal paperchase of childhood*" (California State Department of Education, 1987, p. 2, emphasis added).

The centerpiece of the framework's first section is a two-column table comparing descriptions of effective and ineffective features of language arts programs—what the framework calls for and what it does not, respectively (see Table 2 for excerpts). This practice of juxtaposing the "good" and the "bad" became a common tool in state and district conferences and workshops designed to introduce educators to new curricular frameworks, performance assessments, and school reviews (meaning-centered vs. skill-driven, student- vs. teacher-centered, alternative vs. traditional, authentic vs. standardized, new vs. old). In some cases, juxtapositions were based on fair descriptions and analysis; many others, however, relied heavily on caricatures of traditional teaching and idealizations of desired alternatives.

Meetings 5–7: More Explicit Terms and Conserving

In the first four meetings, teachers described their dissatisfaction with traditional teaching and expressed the desire to incorporate more engaging, natural, and exciting modes of instruction. These alternatives were not yet well articulated; rather, they were defined in terms of what they were not—not traditional teaching. In meetings 5–7, the group began to define traditional and alternative modes of teaching explicitly. In addition, two important and related developments emerged: a recognition that aspects of traditional teaching ought to be preserved for specific purposes and further consideration of the possibility of going "back and forth from one to the other." These developments begin to unfold in the following excerpt, taken from meeting 5. Jana is even more explicit in contrasting some desired alternative and traditional teaching as she understands it:

Jana: I think ... In my mind, and I might not be correct, but for higher-level thinking skills, the children will learn better if you can guide them, facilitate their conversation to a point where they come up with the process. Rather than, "Okay. I'm going to model it for you. This is how you figure out the answer to an inference question." Because then they're just going to hook into—boom, boom, boom, these are the steps.

Alicia: They have to be taught. How are they going to learn how to do it?

Jana: Through what Mary's doing. That kind of thing. The kids are talking. I hear a lot of ohs!

Mary: Yeah, there's a lot of ohs.

Jana: So that means they're hooking into the process. They're coming up with it. (05:36/077)

TABLE 2. Excerpts from the California State Language Arts Framework: Comparison of Features of Effective and Ineffective English Language Arts Programs

Effective Features The Framework Calls For ...	Ineffective Features Rather Than For ...
A literature-based program that encourages reading and exposes all students, including those whose primary language is not English, to significant literary works.	A skill-based program that uses brief, unfocused narratives and work sheets lacking meaningful content or that are constructed to teach independent skills in isolation.
Instructional programs that emphasize the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing and the teaching of language skills in meaningful contexts.	Instructional programs that focus on only one of the language arts at a time, such as reading without purposeful writing, discussing, and listening.

SOURCE.—California State Department of Education (1987, p. 3).

Jana's articulation is a more explicit rendition of the dichotomy than she or any of the other teachers had provided previously. Recall that in meeting 4 she defined alternative teaching ambiguously—students talking, teacher facilitating, not modeling and repeating. Here she identifies a specific goal—"for higher-level thinking skills" so that "they come up with the process." Jana is coming closer to constructing a specific rather than a global definition of alternative teaching.

However, note the brief interchange between Alicia and Jana. Alicia poses a fundamental issue: "They have to be taught. How are they going to learn how to do it?" She is referring to the mental processes involved in "the higher-level thinking skills."

As the discussion progresses, what emerges is the first instance in which traditional and alternative teaching are both maintained. The alternative and the traditional might each have a legitimate role to play.

Jana: I think kids buy into it if they come up with it themselves. And that's why I like what Mary does with the kids.

Alicia: Yeah, sometimes. But I don't think that works all the time.

Sue: But she's leading them. They're not coming up with it by themselves.

Jana: No. I'm not saying, "Find the answer and I'll be back in 5 minutes." But leading the conversation to a point where we're getting these comments like Mary does. Oh wow! Oh yeah!

CG: So you prefer to work at building comprehension through this kind of responsive, conversational—

Jana: I think comprehension works well that way. If it's a skill that I want them to learn and there's a definite way how to do it, then I'll stand up there and say, "Okay, this is how we do it. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom." I'll give the objective and why they need to know it, and I'll model the whole thing and go through all the steps.

Alicia: And also, what about a child that does not know, maybe K, maybe first grade, how to identify detail questions that you're asking him. Specific things. Then I would teach him how to look for specific things. I have a picture in front of me, and I'll say, "This is how you look for details." I can use the word "details" or specific things that I'm looking for. Then you look at the picture. For example, find a red shirt and find a . . . I teach them how to do that. That's one way of teaching it, using the step by step. You teach them, and then you say, "This is how you do this." But many times, that doesn't work. Depending on the story, depending on how you want to approach it, you do then more conversational. *So I think it varies depending on what you want to teach.* (05:38/077; emphasis added)

Jana restates the prevailing proposition: "Kids buy into it if they come up with it themselves . . . that's why I like what Mary does." Alicia attacks the generalization: "I don't think that works all the time." Sue attacks the premise: "But she's leading them. They're not coming up with it by themselves" (a significant shift from the previous characterization of Mary's students coming up with it "all by their little selves"). In effect, Alicia calls for some discrimination, and she provides an elaborate explanation in her last utterance to demonstrate the possibility that it is not a this-or-that issue. As she says in closing, "I think it varies depending on what you want to teach." Sue, in contrast, brings to the forefront what was only hinted at in the previous excerpt: she suggests that Mary is leading the students. In response to Sue's suggestion, Jana then adjusts her characterization, adopting Sue's notion of leading and adding to it: "leading the conversation to a point where we're getting these comments like Mary does."

After CG's suggestion that Jana prefers "this kind of responsive, conversational [approach]," Jana provides what is for the

group a first, a set of conditions under which she might employ traditional teaching (i.e., direct instruction): "if it's a skill that I want them to learn and there's a definite way how to do it." This represents a change from the initial meetings. Direct instruction has been preserved for certain conditions, rather than eliminated, as Jana was inclined to do in earlier meetings. This process of preserving, however, required making the dichotomy and the teachers' perceptions of traditional and alternative teaching more explicit. At this point in meeting 5, the teachers view traditional teaching in the form of direct instruction largely as articulating a performance objective and modeling discrete, though often necessary, skills. They see alternative teaching as leading, guiding students in conversation to build comprehension.

By meeting 7, a new vehicle for the group's work became available. Teachers decided to start videotaping their attempts to implement instructional conversations with groups of students. Thus, from this point on, the group had lessons—a shared dataset—from which they could define and clarify traditional and alternative teaching and their relation to one another. Whereas all the teachers in the group decided to work on instructional conversation to address reading comprehension, the analysis of videotapes concentrated on those most salient elements the teachers associated with alternative teaching: less teacher talk, more student involvement.

However, as they began viewing their attempts at instructional conversation, the teachers also identified instances where they needed to do some direct teaching. As a result, they began preserving and synthesizing alternative and traditional teaching. For example, the following segment occurred midway through meeting 7 as the group viewed one of Alicia's lessons. Alicia had been working on the Experience-Text-Relationship (ETR) framework she had read about in the articles (Au, 1979; Tharp & Gallimore, 1989).

Alicia: So, I wasn't really aware that during the "E," experience part we also have to keep thinking about making sure they understood. I thought it was just talking, discussion, having them tell me experiences about the themes, and leave it at that. I thought it was more of a conversational, you know, relaxed. But there should be a more systematic way of doing it.

CG: Well, I don't know, I mean, what's . . .

Mary: They have to have a real . . . a frame of reference to do this book. They have to really know the difference between the country and the city.

Alicia: It's a difficult story idea for some of them to understand.

Mary: Even for mine [grade 2], it was a big deal.

CG: That's right. Understanding the story presumes certain understandings. Right? One of them being the difference between the city and the country.

Alicia: I see. So during the reading of the story, then, some of those inference questions and higher-level thinking questions can only be answered if, in the beginning, they have a good clear sense of what the story is going to be about. And if we don't make sure that they really have that deep understanding, then our later questions could just go over their heads.

CG: Yeah. They might not make sense. (07:14/083)

In meeting 4, prior to her efforts to try it in the classroom, Alicia made an association between instructional conversation and her interactions with students in the kindergarten yard. Here, she notes the incompleteness of that association: "I wasn't really aware that during the 'E,' experience part we also have to keep thinking about making sure they understood. I thought it was just talking, discussion, having them tell me experiences about the themes, and leave it at that." Now in meeting 7, she is putting the teacher back into the scheme: "We have to

keep thinking about making sure they understood." Previously she had characterized the problem with alternative teaching as too much teacher talk; here she recognizes that simply replacing teacher talk with student talk is not sufficient. She now makes a distinction between casual conversation and conversation that achieves instructional goals: "I thought it was more of a conversational, you know, relaxed. But there should be a more systematic way of doing it."

Mary's response speaks to a problem the group identified: "They have to have a real . . . a frame of reference to do this book. They have to really know the difference between the country and the city." In the lesson, Alicia was trying to help the students make inferences about the feelings shared by one character who lived in the country and another who lived in the city. While viewing the lesson, the group observed that the students were having difficulty making such inferences because they did not fully grasp the distinction between the country and the city. Underlying this assessment is an important premise that CG articulates: "Understanding the story presumes certain understandings." Alicia then provides a more elaborate articulation of this point as it bears on her efforts: "If we don't make sure that they have that deep understanding [of the story], then our later questions could just go over their heads."

Alicia has now brought higher-level thinking (a goal associated with alternative teaching: making inferences, generalizations, connections, interpretations) into a complementary relation to more basic, literal comprehension—"A clear sense of what the story is about" (a goal associated with traditional teaching: knowing what happens). Again, this is a process of conserving and synthesizing; the goals of the alternative and traditional function simultaneously rather than in isolation from one another.

The discussion also emphasizes the importance of identifying what students might need to know in order to understand a story fully and the prospect of teaching directly to those needs. This point emerges more explicitly as the group continues to view and analyze Alicia's lesson.

CG: Okay, so you're trying to wrap up here, at this point. Okay, what are the differences between the [the country and city]? And to see if they got a sense of the two. What's your sense? Did they have a distinction between city and country?

Alicia: I got a feeling they did, but looking at it twice, I could have spent a minute more or 2 and just feeling more comfortable than how I felt. That they really knew the difference. Then again, tying it. I should have possibly tied that to the theme I had in mind. I don't know.

CG: The one of being comfortable in your home, you mean?

Alicia: Mmhmm.

Sue: There's quite a difference between those two, and they're far apart. And maybe it doesn't have much to do with—

Alicia: That wasn't the place to do that. It was more of a sense that they needed the difference. That's it.

CG: Right. There's nothing wrong, right?, with . . . You could do a lesson just on the differences on country and city. Where your objective is really to have them discriminate key features of the city from key features in the country, for 1 day. That's a perfectly decent objective, right?

Sue: Mmhmm.

CG: And then the next day you can get into feeling comfortable at home or something like that. I don't know, would you all agree that would be a perfect lesson for a day?

All: Sure. (07:18/84a)

The critical point that emerges in this excerpt is the appropriateness of direct instruction within the general framework of a responsive, conversational approach. As CG suggests, there is nothing incompatible

about the two. In fact, based on an identified need, the former might well serve the latter. As CG elaborates a bit later, "It depends on their [the students'] level of knowledge. If you've determined that a certain level of knowledge is important ... [and] they don't know that, then you really got to make sure you teach it." The relevance of direct teaching emerged consistently as the group worked to identify the elements of instructional conversation across the year. In fact, "direct teaching" was written in and detailed as an IC element precisely because the group came to realize that ICs often require direct teaching.

The importance of these excerpts from meeting 7 lies in the gradual erosion of the strict, though implicit, dichotomy evident in the first few meetings. By this point, the teachers are focused more on doing the alternative kind of teaching they had only discussed previously in idealized terms. Alicia's lesson is an important illustration. As she tried to achieve a goal (have students infer characters' common feelings), it became clear that students did not fully understand an important aspect of the story (the distinction between country and city), and an appropriate response was to provide some directed teaching (to clarify the distinction) in order to make headway toward the larger goal (have students construct inferences). Recall that in meeting 4, teachers questioned whether this would be appropriate, whether instructional conversation and direct instruction were compatible ("Can you go back and forth from one to the other?"). This change may have resulted from earlier discussions, or from the group's moving from the abstraction to the actual implementation of lessons, or perhaps some combination of the two.

In either case, there is a parallel here between how things take shape at the abstract level of ideas, as is the case with frameworks for curriculum and teaching (and teacher assessment), and the reality of the classroom. One can well imagine (indeed, readily find) contentious debates about the relative emphasis to be placed on skills or meaning, practice or discovery, and traditional or constructivist teaching, especially given so much pressure to bring about reform. Ironically, most teachers would identify with the events that transpired in Alicia's lesson and the upshot of the group's analysis, which is that there is a need for directed teaching within the context of more constructivist approaches. One should not take lightly, however, the propensity of reform-intended frameworks (and reform-intended discourse more generally) to marginalize rather than make central what we would argue is a basic truism of teaching and learning: teachers and students must deal with many different types of knowledge, skills, and understanding; they should therefore have available to them a wide range of legitimate instructional options.

California's experience is a cautionary tale. Some 8 years after releasing its much-heralded English language arts framework, the state department of education finally redressed the lack of balance in the document and called for the reintroduction of skills in teaching reading and language arts (California State Department of Education, 1995; Diegmueller, 1995). Unfortunately, this reintroduction is once again being cast as the victory of one side of a dichotomy over another. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* proclaimed, "Labeling nearly a decade-long experiment in progressive teaching methods a failure, a state task force today will call on California schools to resume teaching phonics, spelling and other basic reading skills" (Colvin, 1995, p. A1).

Meetings 8–9: Explicit Terms and Synthesizing

In meeting 8, the group was discussing how to provide sufficient time for their instructional conversations. With more emphasis on discussion, they anticipated two problems: (1) they would not meet the coverage requirements maintained at the

school (number of stories in the reading book) and (2) they would not be able to address the skill exercises accompanying the reading series. Mary said that she typically focused her efforts on comprehension, employing the more conversational approach while her aide covered the skill exercises with a more directed and traditional approach. The group spent some time discussing the prospects of this division of instructional duties and then began comparing and contrasting what Mary did and what her aide did in light of their discussions about direct instruction and instructional conversation (the group was now referring to the alternative as instructional conversation). With lessons to plan and analyze already scheduled, there was time for only brief discussion of this unanticipated contrast. In meeting 9, however, the group spent most of their time on this contrast and listed the characteristics of direct instruction and instructional conversation.

CG: We were talking about the direct instruction, and we were making the comparison with [writes on chart paper: "direct instruction" on one side, "instructional conversation" on the other] . . . What I'd like to do, because it's not really clear to me what [IC] consists of, and from the discussion that we've had for the past few weeks, it's clear that there are some of these things going on in what we've been . . . taping. Personally I don't feel like I have a handle on [IC] in the same way that I feel like I have a handle on [DI]. Does anyone share that sense?

Mary: To me, . . . is, it's . . . the instructional conversation is the comprehension, the schema stuff, the before, the beyond activities. The thinking strategies and that kind of thing. And then the direct instruction is "we're going to circle the ones that have the *a* sounds, and we're going to fill in this blank, and we're going to read to find out blah blah." And there's some honest to goodness real answers to direct instruction. But I think the instructional conversations can be, or that's what I think anyway, any answer that makes some sort of sense. Either an "into" or the what-do-you-think. That kind of thing.

Jana: I see direct instruction as very structured. Teacher models. It's usually skill-based. Like Mary said, something exact the students have to learn. Whereas instructional conversation is teacher-facilitated discussion of whatever it is you're doing. And it's used for comprehension. You get kids involved in the lesson to preview and predict what's going to happen. And if it's really done correctly, you'll have kids sitting around talking and it will flow without the teacher pointing.

CG: Could we list some contrasting features, out of what you all just said? What's one feature of direct instruction? (09:04/095)

As CG points out in his initiation of the discussion, the group has arrived at a point when such a comparison is possible because they had actually been trying to instantiate instructional conversation in the classroom. Thus, they could begin listing characteristics based not just on abstractions but on what they were trying to do during IC lessons. The articles the group had read did not provide a delineation of the IC elements. They characterized IC in more general and abstract terms. This process of listing elements was an exercise in making the alternative explicit. As will become evident, however, it was achieved by also making the traditional explicit.

Following CG's initiation, both Mary and Jana provide an initial comparison. What is most striking about their descriptions, especially about Jana's, is the discriminations they apply. Gone is the sense of instructional conversation as a global form of teaching designed to replace direct instruction. Rather, they establish the character of each and specify its area of application. As Jana says, "Direct instruction is very struc-

tured. Teacher models. It's usually skill-based. Like Mary said, something exact the students have to learn. Whereas instructional conversation is teacher-facilitated discussion of whatever it is you're doing. And it's used for comprehension." In fact, Jana's and Mary's descriptions together provide a comparison based on goals and the instructional means, respectively, the what and how (see Table 3, "Initial Comparison" columns).

With this initial comparison made, at CG's urging, the group generated a more comprehensive list of the elements for each mode of instruction. This discussion lasted approximately 40 minutes; thus, it is far too long to present in transcript form. However, to capture the gist of the discussion, we provide representation of the items generated across the discussion in Table 3 (see Table 3, "Final Comparison" columns).

This discussion in meeting 9 represents the culmination of the group's efforts across the first eight meetings. In fact, the 40 minutes of discussion represent in a shorter time the same process that transpired across the eight meetings—gradually drawing out and constructing more explicit terms with which to define the two modes of teaching.

It is important to restate that the group had coalesced around the intent to instantiate some form of alternative teaching, which was its goal, rather than to conduct a study of direct instruction. And yet, as we have tried to demonstrate in this analysis, instantiating the alternative, developing instructional conversation as a mode of teaching, was well served by making the more familiar traditional mode of teaching more explicit, and in effect, preserving some of the elements that originally the teachers assumed would be tossed out. Recall Jana's comment in meeting 2: "[I'm] tired of all this direct instruction, objectives, structured teaching, etc. etc. etc. [I] want to get into the creative, dynamic, spontaneous teaching that Mary [does]." In meeting 9, some time after listing elements, CG asked the teachers what they thought of the claims in the direct instruction articles that such an approach could in fact yield comprehension. Jana's response stands in stark contrast to her comments in meeting 2.

Jana: It's important because kids need skills to be able to function, but they also need to see the whole picture and be able to pull both parts together. What they've learned. The skills and being able to think. To function as real people, producing real things. Not just giving answers that a teacher wants.

Sue: There's no reason why we can't combine those two.

Alicia: When we do reading we should. We have to.

Jana: That's why I was getting upset whenever you said direct instruction because in my mind I was thinking, "Okay, so seven-step the kids to death." And I'm going to push the kids out of this room and they're going to pass these tests because the test is set up just to test if they have the skill. And they don't know anything. And they're going some place else, but I've been successful because they can follow the process. And it just upset me that this was happening, and I want some other way to make sure that they could really do it.

CG: Uh huh.

Jana: I like that instructional conversation. I think it's wonderful. That's what I kept saying. I want to learn to do what Mary does because I saw that as the way to get . . . to pull the kids together as a whole. Not just send them out with skills. (09:18/100)

What comes through in Jana's remarks—and is articulated explicitly by Sue and Alicia—is a justification for preserving the existing as part of the process of moving progressively forward. Clearly, as it is most explicitly articulated here, the traditional teaching to which they were accustomed simply did not provide a sufficient condition for what they wanted their students to

TABLE 3. Teachers' Initial and Final Comparisons of Direct Instruction and Instructional Conversation

	Initial Comparison		Final Comparison	
	Direct Instruction	Instructional Conversation	Direct Instruction	Instructional Conversation
Goals	Real answers	Comprehension	Mastery Real answers	Conversation Comprehension
	Skills	Thinking strategies	Skills Specific knowledge	Thinking strategies Big picture: What story's about
	Specific knowledge		Specific comprehension skills Achieve modeled performance	Opinion, interpretations, justifications, substantiations
Means	Teacher models	Teacher facilitates	Teacher models Teacher tells	Teacher facilitates Teacher draws on students' knowledge and experiences
	Structured tasks	Discussion	Teacher checks for understanding	
	Students practice	Students talking	Structured tasks Systematic, step-by-step Students practice Minimal discussion	Teacher builds on information from students Teacher encourages different ideas Students talking Extensive discussion Fewer absolutes
Added features				Comfortable atmosphere A purpose for reading (students' experiences)

achieve. As Jana says, "But they also need to see the whole picture . . . not just giving answers that a teacher wants . . . I want some other way to make sure that they could really do it. . . . I want to learn to do what Mary does because I saw that as the way to get . . . to pull the kids together as a whole. Not just send them out with skills." But this explicit articulation emerged over the course of the eight meetings. What the teachers, and specifically Jana, wanted, what they saw as lacking, their ability to identify the goal for their efforts to develop "some other way," was achieved through this process of making explicit their perceptions of traditional teaching and the desired alternative.

Perhaps the value of such a process is best exemplified in the final segment to be presented. Immediately following the discussion about the the claims in the direct instruction articles, CG posed a similar question concerning instructional conversation.

CG: Okay. What's instructional about instructional conversation? What's instructional about it?
Jana: The teacher.
Mary: The teacher.

Jana: The teacher facilitates and guides. The kids don't come up with this if you just sit them in a room together and leave.
CG: But how?
Alicia: There should be objectives.
Sue: A goal. A goal.
Alicia: Like when I did *La ratonsita del campo* [*The Country Mouse*], I had in my mind, even though we were talking about it, I wanted them . . . There were some objectives. I wanted them to know what a *campo* was versus the city. I was not just talking, talking. I was somewhat pressured because I wanted them to learn something from the conversation. The difference between the two and really guiding them to the objective of the story. A theme.
CG: Now you said talking. Is talking part of the instruction? Getting them to talk, is that part of the instruction?
Alicia: Mmhmm. Well, maybe the objectives could be that. Just have them talk, talk, talk to enhance their language and it doesn't matter how far—
Sue: That was going on with me too. I was more interested in just—
Alicia: So it just depends on what the objective is. What you really want to have them do.
Sue: It was hard for me to concentrate on my objective because I was interested in getting their ideas.
Alicia: Your objective was just to have them express themselves.
Sue: Yeah, that seemed almost enough in itself. And yet . . . Probably I should be focusing more on getting them some place. (09:19/101)

This excerpt could be contrasted to many excerpts from the earlier meetings. Recall the excerpt from meeting 3 where Mary attributed the success of her lesson to her absence of lecture: "They found that out like all by their little selves." Recall the excerpt in meeting 4 when Alicia said, "The error is that the teacher does all the talking." These implicit perceptions ran the risk of eliminating the role of the teacher from instruction. By meeting 9, however, that role had been conserved. As Jana notes: "The kids don't come up with this if you just sit them in a room together and leave." And Sue is even more explicit when she says, "Probably I should be focusing more on getting them some place."

During the entire year, beyond these first nine meetings, the teachers were required systematically to define and develop the skills necessary to facilitate conversation and guide students to higher levels of understanding. The work following the first nine meetings was consistently focused by something conserved in these initial meetings and articulated in the excerpt above: "There should be objectives. . . . A goal. A goal." As Alicia notes (and this stands in sharp contrast to her descriptions in meeting 4 of the kindergarten yard conversations): "I was not just talking, talking. I was somewhat pressured because I wanted them to learn something from the conversation." To some extent, that is the critical distinction between what might not occur in the kindergarten yard during recess and what should occur in the classroom—the teacher bears some responsibility for ensuring that students learn.

Elsewhere we have documented the group's yearlong process of implementing and studying instructional conversation. Across the subsequent 21 meetings, teachers planned, tried, videotaped, and reviewed tapes of their ICs in order to improve their skills and understanding of IC as a mode of teaching (Saunders et al., 1992). Teachers improved their ability to conduct lively conversations that were instructional, that elicited students' active involvement and helped them construct deeper understandings of stories and themes (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1990; Rueda et al., 1991). Much of this success was made possible because these first nine meetings produced a conceptualization of IC—of alternative teaching—that preserved an explicit and central role for the teacher, one

that required skills, knowledge, and planning.

In meeting 3, Jana correctly anticipated that schools and teachers would be held accountable by the state for implementing the language arts framework. In fact, 3 years later the state published revised guidelines for required school reviews (California State Department of Education, 1992). Administrators and teachers used them to assess the extent to which their programs were consistent with state frameworks. Covering 17 pages and including 90 short vignettes, the guidelines for language arts describe what an "activity-based, meaningful thinking curriculum" (Part I, p. 1) should look like. Indeed, the vignettes paint a worthwhile vision of language arts curriculum and instruction: students selecting their own books, reading and discussing works of literature, confronting issues and values, collaborating in groups, developing and publishing challenging projects.

One of the most striking aspects of the guidelines, however, is that they rarely mention teachers and teaching. Less than 20% of the vignettes include any reference to teachers at all. Across the entire 17-page document, there are only 20 uses of the word teaching or teacher and only five of these describe explicit acts typically associated with traditional teaching (modeling, delivering a minilesson, conferencing). The most common teacher behavior mentioned is reading to students. Whatever the justification or intent, the guidelines essentially portray teachers as nothing more than supporting players. For example, they state: "After listening to a reading of *Little Red Hen*, first-grade children break into small groups to discuss whether the main character should have shared her bread with the other characters. After their discussion, the teacher reads a variation in which the little red hen does share with her friends. The children discuss the two stories and the importance of sharing, and record their feelings about the different versions on a wall chart" (California State Department of Education, 1992, Part II, p. 3).

This vignette is consistent with the kinds of changes teachers in the group wanted to make in their reading programs. They were compelled by the constructivist vision set forth in the state framework. Yet, the important characteristic of their story is that they made significant strides toward that vision by focusing directly on teaching rather than relegating it to the periphery.

Conclusion

In discussing the historical conflict between different conceptions of teaching, Walberg (1986, p. 226) observed that "perhaps since Socrates . . . these [differing conceptions of teaching] have remained so polarized that educators find it difficult to stand firmly on the high middle ground of balanced or cooperative determination of the goals, means, and evaluation of learning." Our assumption is that "the high middle ground" is attainable. Getting there, however, requires a sustained and intensive drive, part of which will necessarily involve a reexamination of teacher training and teacher assessment. Such a reexamination will involve at least four components.

First, teacher assessments should promote a more complex repertoire of knowledge and skills by validating and operationalizing a range of teaching modes. A broader scope with respect to reforming and assessing teaching is needed, one that takes as its goal achieving a comprehensive and more inclusive conceptualization of teaching and learning. The traditional-alternative dichotomy—an important influence on historical and current reform movements—is misguided and unproductive. It is misguided in that it sets in opposition educational approaches that are complementary rather than antagonistic. It is unproductive in that it encourages educators to think in terms of competing, rather than comprehensive, systems of teaching and learning. Teacher assessment schemes can and should facilitate precisely such a com-

prehensive system of teaching and learning. As Delandshere and Petrosky (1994) have argued, any stance toward teacher assessment necessarily implies an ideological or philosophical position. Our position is this: Since the goals and ends of teaching are many and complex, so too must be the means. Exclusive reliance on one or another model or theory is unwise.

Second, those who develop new assessments should take seriously the quality and explicitness with which desired, alternative modes of teaching are defined. Teachers in this project wanted to engage in teaching that facilitated students' understanding and higher-order thinking. They assumed their upcoming reviews would focus on this sort of teaching. Although curricular frameworks provided them with a general vision and direction, the teachers lacked any models on which to build their practices. The teachers viewed alternative teaching, therefore, as an idealized entity and defined it more in terms of what it was not (it was *not* traditional directed teaching) than what it was. This phenomenon is by no means unique to the teachers in this project. Dewey (1938, p. 22) noted the same problem in his later assessments of the progressive schools:

> The problems are not even recognized, to say nothing of being solved, when it is assumed that it suffices to reject the ideas and practices of old education and then go to the opposite extreme. . . . Many of the newer schools tend to make little or nothing of organized subject-matter of study; to proceed as if any form of direction or guidance by adults were an invasion of individual freedom, and as if the idea that education should be concerned with the present and future meant that acquaintance with the past has little or no role to play in education. . . . These defects illustrate what is meant by a theory or practice of education which proceeds negatively or by reaction against what has been current in education rather than by positive and constructive development of purposes, methods, and subject matter.

Current work on teacher assessment that seeks to bring about constructivist reforms will necessitate the kind of positive and constructive development work Dewey describes.

Third, those who are designing and will use new teacher assessments to help reform teaching should recognize that many teachers are interested in alternative forms of teaching. Reformers often assume that teachers have to be persuaded to try alternative forms of teaching and be shaken loose from their reliance on traditional instruction. That was not at all the case with the teachers here. To the contrary, they were eager to respond to the vision laid out in the state framework, and they wanted to move on to alternative forms of teaching that would help them accomplish what they felt more traditional instruction could not.

Fourth, as new frameworks for teaching and teacher assessments are implemented, teachers will require learning opportunities that include sustained and detailed consideration of relevant instructional modes. A salient obstacle for the teachers in this project was the way they had framed the relation between traditional and alternative teaching, as if they had to take sides. If you are doing one, you cannot do the other. Such an either/or perception did not withstand the experiences teachers had in the classroom as they tried to do alternative teaching. In the context of trying to achieve specific goals with their students, then discussing and analyzing videotapes of their lessons, the dichotomization of the two forms of teaching did not hold up; teachers found they had to aim for a constructive synthesis.

Epilogue

Recently we interviewed three of the four teachers involved in the group. Now, years later, each teacher reports that the group had a lasting effect on her teaching. Sue and Mary teach, respectively, first and second grade. They report that they continue to use instructional conversation to build compre-

hension of stories and also in other curricular areas when their goal is helping students construct and articulate conceptual understandings (i.e., during hands-on math and science activities). Alicia works in a special university-sponsored preschool program that emphasizes discovery learning. She explained how she uses IC to help students make observations and talk about what they are doing, and to "bring out their learning." The ICs provide her with access to students' thinking processes. Sue made a similar point, explaining that certain elements of instructional conversation have spread throughout her teaching:

> IC is a part of everything. Children have to have the feeling that they can get involved and express their feelings and ideas. So the idea of the children responding with their ideas and listening to one another can't be just isolated to one part of the day. It has to happen more frequently than that, so they can feel free to think, express their ideas, even if they're different from what others are saying. Quite often they'll come up with something and it seems maybe way off, but then I know they are not understanding, and that helps me know what to do. But other times they come up with something I haven't thought of—that I'd not planned for—so listening carefully to what they say provides me with an idea of where I can go.

Although the teachers' self-reports suggest that they internalized the central constructivist elements of instructional conversation, each teacher also talked about her ongoing use of direct instruction as a counterpart to IC. As Mary explained: "I use direct instruction for the basic skills I have to teach, like suffixes and pronouns and stuff like that. When answers are black and white, IC doesn't get you any more mileage, but when it's comprehension of stories—for things like that, you get better results with IC. Like in math, I use IC when we are working with manipulatives to get students talking about what they are doing. But if I am teaching a specific skill—like finding the key words in a math problem—well, I do the other [direct instruction]."

We have noticed lately the terms, "constructivist teaching" and "constructivist teachers," appear in advertisements for conferences and in the literature. Data from our interviews do not suggest that teachers in the group took their study and continued use of IC as a total makeover of their teaching. Rather, IC was a long-desired addition to their teaching repertoire. According to the teachers' accounts, carefully studying direct instruction and instructional conversation was a significant part of their group involvement. According to Sue, "It did have an impact on my teaching because I was more conscious of what I was doing. And I remember thinking, no, this warrants more direct teaching, and at other times I remember thinking this is better for IC." In fact, Sue explained that she addresses both DI and IC as part of her work with student teachers:

> A teacher does things instinctively that produce results. But those discussions [of DI and IC] helped me realize what I was doing to produce certain results, and what I was doing, and could and should do more of to produce other kinds of results. . . . I have been pointing that out with my student teachers. I try to show them some of those things. For IC, the small groups, the higher-level questions, getting more responses, drawing more out of the children. And when a child has an idea you try to follow up on what kids say and that children's responses are not right or wrong. Even if it sounds off base, you want to listen to see if they have an idea, if they are thinking. And for more direct instruction, showing [student teachers] that you don't have to hear from every child. Group responses are okay—thumbs up, thumbs down—because you want to keep moving. The questioning is less probing. You have a certain response you want [students] to practice, and you might even phrase a group response for them and model it.

Some 6 years later, the teachers' reports suggest that their involvement in the group

helped them construct a more comprehensive and multifaceted view of teaching.

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